GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:243
ANSWERED ON:20.03.2002
HEPATITIS - B CASES
PADAMSEN CHAUDHARY;SATYAVRAT CHATURVEDI

Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the attention of the Government has been drawn towards the news-item captioned `4.5 crore patients afflicted with Hepatitis-B and C`, appearing in the `Dainik Jagaran` dated December 4, 2001;

(b) if so, the facts of the cases reported therein;

(c) the steps taken by the Government to provide immediate and free medical treatment to the patients afflicted with Hepatitis-B and C; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

Answer

MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (DR. C.P. THAKUR)

(a)to(d): A statement is laid on the table of the Lok Sabha.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 243 FOR 20.3.2002

Viral Hepatitis can be caused by many viruses including Hepatitis B virus and Hepatitis C virus. As per information received from the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence, the total reported cases of Viral Hepatitis in the last 3 years were 113,527 in 1998, 131,798 in 1999 and 148,754 in the year 2000. However, studies based on institutional data indicate that a significant proportion of the population may be carriers of Hepatitis B and C viruses, though only a small number would manifest the disease and require treatment.

The high risk groups for infection of Hepatitis B and C are infants, children, health care workers and those who are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection as the disease spreads through unsafe sex, unsafe blood transfusion, injection etc. and also from mother to child. These types of viral hepatitis do not usually cause outbreaks but cause chronicity leading in some cases to cirrhosis and even liver cancer.

Treatment of Hepatitis B and C is prohibitively expensive and involves the use of anti-viral therapy using drugs such as Interferon and Lamivudine over a long period of time. It is far more cost effective to take steps to prevent the infection with Hepatitis B or C rather than go for curative therapy.

The following measures have been taken to prevent infection of viral hepatitis:

- Central Government hospital personnel at high risk are being immunized against Hepatitis-B. State Governments have also been advised to take similar steps.

- Guidelines have been issued for mandatory testing of blood in all blood banks.

- Promotion of safe sex under National AIDS Control Programme is advocated.

- Health awareness campaigns regarding the danger of using unsterile syringes and needles under National AIDS Control Programme are held.

- Guidelines have been issued to State Health authorities for use of separate sterile syringes and needles for each injection.

- A pilot project to introduce Hepatitis B vaccine in 15 selected cities and 32 districts in 17 States of the country, which are high-risk areas, in order to study the impact of administration, is likely to be launched shortly. The pilot project is estimated to cost Rs.27.19 crores out of which vaccines and AD syringes cost Rs.23.89 crores, which will be funded by the Global Alliance on Vaccine and Immunization (GAVI). No vaccine is available yet for Hepatitis-C infection.

- As data presently available about prevalence of Hepatitis B and C is not wholly representative, Sentinel sites are being set up all over the country, in association with the National AIDS Control Programme, in order to arrive at an accurate estimate of the number of persons in the country infected with Hepatitis B and C viruses.